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LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS MAY EMBARRASS THAI GOVERNMENT

The government party may not win a majority in the first legislative elections held under the new Thai constitution.

The military-dominated government promulgated a constitution last summer providing for the first lower house elections in ten years. The upper house is appointed by the government. With just over a week to go before the balloting on 10 February, the government's Saha Pracha Thai (SPT) Party is still having trouble getting itself organized.

The party's first public rally in the Bangkok area, which has 21 of the lower house's 219 seats, ended in a minor fiasco last week when poorly prepared SPT speakers were hooted off the platform. Government leaders had put together a strong ticket in Bangkok in hopes of cutting into the opposition Democratic Party's traditional strength in the capital.

The SPT does not appear to be faring much better outside Bangkok. In the countryside the party seems beset with internal bickering, much of which stems from a fractious party meeting in Bangkok last November when a split in the ranks was only narrowly averted. In some provinces, SPT candidates are working at

cross purposes; in others, the original SPT candidates have quit the party in order to run as independents.

Despite its erratic performance, the SPT is the only party organized on a national basis and which has a candidate for every lower house seat. The party's woes are also mitigated to some extent by the fragmented nature of the opposition. The middle-of-the-road Democrats, whose organizational skill and party discipline are the major surprises of the campaign, are not expected even by their most optimistic supporters to win more than one third of the seats. The other splinter parties, most of them regionally based, appear to be running according to form, while independent candidates--many of whom apparently have substantial local backing--are showing considerable strength.

The combined opposition appears to have an excellent chance of denying the SPT a majority in the lower house. Recent statements by government leaders, pointing out that the 'lower house's powers are carefully circumscribed, indicate that Thailand's military leadership is aware that it may not get the popular endorsement hoped for in the elections.

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LEADERSHIP TURNOUT MASKS CONTINUING DISSENSION IN CHINA

All the top Chinese leaders appeared together publicly on 25 January for the first time in three and a half months at a rally, held in part to dispel widespread rumors within China about Mao's health and changes in the leadership.

All 14 in the political elite were present, for Peking's display of unity. The only alteration in the top ranks was a slight further demotion for economic planner Li Fu-chun, who was criticized in 1968, and subsequently was dropped from the inner circle. The turnout thus sheds no light on the political infighting believed to be taking place behind the scenes in advance of the ninth party congress, now expected within the next few months.

The necessary political alignments in some provinces are still not firm. In Sinkiang, for example, local broadcasts have for weeks been denouncing a leader easily identifiable as Wang En-mao, the former military and party boss there. Wang nonetheless showed up in Peking among important regional military leaders. The position of his name, immediately following a group of Nanking Military Region officers, could imply that he has been transferred.

Peking's latest concern over the political reliability of military commands in the provinces is reflected in a recent directive by the central committee's Military Affairs Commission about

strengthening unity between "army and government." Because local government units nearly everywhere are dominated by military representatives, this directive carries the implication that splits are developing within the military, between those who have assumed political responsibility and those who lack it.

In Kweichow Province, long a stronghold of radical military officers, recent radiobroadcasts criticized some local military districts for "mishandling" relations with the government, and stated that new military units have been transferred into the province. It is not clear whether they were to reinforce the military establishment now running Kweichow, or to weaken its authority.

Reflections of political struggle continue to be noted in some other provinces. Outbreaks of fighting at Hsuchou, reported periodically since January 1967, probably reflect a jurisdictional conflict between the Nanking and the neighboring Tsinan military commands. The Nanking commander, who also heads the Kiangsu government, has civil responsibility for the province, but regular army units under the command of the Tsinan Military Region control the Hsuchou area. Earlier in the Cultural Revolution the two military commanders seemed to be politically opposed, and in June 1968 the Nanking region commander publicly criticized the Tsinan Military Region for mishandling conditions in Hsuchou. (~~SECRET~~)

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